



Bill Gradle,
NRCS State Conservationist



CONGRESSMAN LANE EVANS

Conservation Update

in Illinois Congressional District

17



Spring 2000

Resource Planning Guidebook

NRCS has created an invaluable tool to help local constituents better address local community and watershed issues. It's called the "Resource Planning Guidebook," or RPG for short. In it are a series of factsheets and information guides to help local resource planning steering committees successfully complete resource planning.



Many communities and residents in Northwest Illinois are already involved in or beginning resource planning efforts needed to address issues such as flooding, water quality, open space needs, and others. With the tools in the "RPG," these committees will be successful.

Some of the issues covered in the Guidebook include:

- Working with the Media
- Building Local Ownership of Resource Plans
- Listening Skills
- Conflict Management
- Defining the Planning Area
- Identifying Stakeholders for the Planning Committee

NRCS State Conservationist Bill Gradle is pleased with the Guidebook contents. "This is the 'toolkit' locally led groups will use to address the issues their communities are facing. We've pulled together a volume of tips, guides, and processes that will ensure successful plans and projects across the state," comments Gradle. The Guidebook has received such praise from other conservationists across the nation that NRCS is considering national distribution.

"T" By 2000

For the past decade, the goal of the Illinois Conservation Partnership has been to bring soil loss levels in Illinois down to, or beneath, tolerable levels, or "T" by the year 2000. Well, the year 2000 is here, so where are our soil loss levels? "I can't say that all soil loss on cropland is down to 'T,'" says NRCS State Conservationist Bill Gradle. "The data we've seen, and the data we've collected with the help of IDOA tells us we came close, but we still have work to do."

Across the state, erosion levels are at "T" on about 86% of cropland. "T" means erosion is occurring at a rate that ensures the soil's long-term productivity. Keep in mind that "T" soil loss data only considers sheet and rill erosion--it does NOT include other very common and problematic types of erosion, such as classic "gully" erosion or streambank erosion. Increased application of conservation practices, made pos-

sible through additional program funds and support, will give producers incentives and financial means to put more conservation on the ground and reach the 100% goal. The Clinton Administration's new "Conservation Security Program" concept may make the "T" by 2000 goal a reality by increasing conservation program funding in FY 2001.

SWCD Legislation Impacts Your Urban Constituents

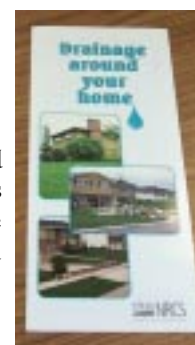
The Illinois Senate and House of Representatives passed House Bill 2112 which amends the Soil and Water Conservation District Act to provide that all areas within each county are to be considered within the boundaries of their local SWCD.

The purpose of this legislation is to allow SWCDs to serve ALL residents within the entire county. The services SWCDs can make available to residents may include issues such as subdivision development ordinances, construction site erosion control ordinances, etc. With towns, villages, and municipalities now included within Districts, the number of clients and communities able to receive natural resource assistance is expanded. The role and importance of Districts in the scheme of things—land use planning, soil erosion and sediment control issues, farmland preservation issues, simple assistance to homeowners, education and outreach initiatives—will increase.

Keep in mind, however, that this legislation will not result in any increases in local property taxes. No new funds will be levied in order to support this expanded client base. SWCDs receive their support and funding through grant funds appropriated to the Illinois Department of Agriculture.

NRCS Has Help for Wet Basements

NRCS just produced a brochure, "Drainage Around Your Home." The brochure targets homeowners who may be experiencing problems in their home due to flooding or wet basements. NRCS and SWCD Field Offices often receive visits from "non-farming clients" who need ideas or simple solutions to this very common problem.



State Conservationist Bill Gradle says their needs are real and we can help them solve their problems. "NRCS' experience with soil and water can provide some very simple ideas and techniques that any homeowner can apply to reduce wetness problems. With this brochure, they can take the information they need home with them and put it to work."

The information provided in the brochure is also available on the

NRCS Homepage. In addition to providing information homeowners can use, the NRCS also provides valuable tips for individuals having new homes constructed. There are techniques that can be applied during construction that will help avoid flooding or wet basement problems before they start. Visit www.il.nrcs.usda.gov today!

NRCS-IDNR Are Official Partners



NRCS State Conservationist Bill Gradle and Brent Manning, State Director for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), signed a Memorandum of Understanding on August 17, 1999 to solidify their partnership and ensure their commitment to joint projects and initiatives throughout the state. NRCS and IDNR have been partners in natural resource protection for years, but had never made any formal announcement.

Aging Dams-A Problem We Can't Ignore

Sprinkled along the rivers and valleys of almost every state in the nation—including Illinois—are small flood control dams. These dams and flood control reservoirs are protecting communities all across the country. Many serve as "multipurpose" structures, providing parks, ball fields, and other recreational facilities since they only fill up with water when the floodwaters come.

There are 10,400 such dams in the U.S. Many constructed years ago—some as much as 40 to 50 years ago. They have done well, protected many from floods that would have destroyed their homes, communities, and lives. These watershed structures provide public benefits worth about \$800 million every year. In Illinois there are 64 upstream flood control dams in 14 watersheds which protect communities and citizens on more than 645,000 acres of land. The problem is that these structures,

built 40 or more years ago were designed and built with a 50 year lifespan. What that means is that these structures are in trouble. And so are the communities they've been faithfully protecting. By the year 2000, 1,200 of the nation's flood control structures will require significant restoration

In Illinois there are 11 dams that are 40-44 years old and another 16 that are 30-39 years old. Another 28 dams are 20-29 years old and will need attention within the next decade. The structures are aging as sediment weakens the structural soundness of the dams and threatens farmland and residential areas that have been built up over the years. Some sites will only require minimal repairs and maintenance to function properly. Others will need more intense attention, and in a few states, some dams may need to be entirely rebuilt.

"These structures have served our communities well for many years," says NRCS State Conservationist Bill Gradle. "They have paid for themselves many times over in protection and peace of mind." Gradle encourages community leaders to take action needed to ensure the longevity of any flood control structures in their area. "It's a good investment for rural Illinois and urban Illinois. You don't wait to get health insurance until you're in intensive care," adds Gradle. For more details, look up House Resolution 728, "Small Watershed Rehabilitation Amendments Act of 1999.

Buffer Strips

NRCS has a national initiative to have private landowners establish buffer strips on their farms, along creeks and streams, and fields. Buffer strips are a valuable part of any conservation system. They help reduce erosion, catch sediment before it enters watercourses, improve water quality, and provide habitat for many different species of wildlife.

To date, Illinois landowners have established 98,320 acres of buffers. The state goal has been set at 393,280 acres. New Goals:

2000	24,997 acres
2001	49,995 acres
2002	49,995 acres

Can we accomplish these goals? NRCS says "YES!" Buffers are a good economic and environmental investment for farmers. The cost-share and incentives for installing buffers is a popular option and NRCS feels reaching the goals is definitely possible. While Illinois'

landowners have already indicated a great interest in buffers, there are still many farms in need of the protection buffers can provide.

CREP Going Strong

Interest in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) continues to grow. Recently, the LaMoine River Watershed area was added to the list of eligible CREP areas, expanding a great opportunity for conservation and financial assistance to a number of landowners in the Illinois River watershed area. CREP counties in District 17 include parts of Bureau, Knox, Fulton, McDonough, Hancock, Henderson, and Warren.

Through CREP, the Knox County NRCS and SWCD staff has enrolled and installed more than 125 acres of wetland restoration and wildlife habitat in the Spoons River bottom. By blocking off existing tile lines and building a series of low level berms, they effectively flooded 35 acres of previously cropped farmland. The landowner is able to fluctuate the water level in the wetland through a special valve. These activities are working effectively to reduce the sediment load in the Illinois River.

Like the ever-popular CRP, CREP offers even better incentives for landowners willing to make longer or even permanent commitments of their marginal or floodplain cropland. CREP offers the usual FSA cost-share and rental payments, the usual NRCS technical assistance and planning help, but adds even more incentive payments from the state of Illinois. "For areas that aren't highly productive or areas that are so close to the river that they flood frequently, CREP is the best bet out there," says NRCS' State Farm Bill Coordinator Paula Hingson. According to Hingson, CREP is only available in a few states, so she's glad Illinois is one of them. "It's been a great program and a great tool for getting conservation on some very crucial areas in the Illinois River watershed," adds Hingson.

NRCS will continue to work with private landowners and work towards the 2000 goals.

Urban Manual

NRCS' Urban Manual continues to be a crucial document in controlling soil erosion and sediment in Congressional District 17. The NRCS Urban Manual, a manual that contains the standards and specifications for soil erosion and sediment control techniques used in





urban environments, is continually updated and improved as a valuable conservation tool. NRCS formed a committee from various stakeholders in urban areas which provides input and feedback on ways to improve the manual and make it more valuable to local units of government and other consultants and engineers who use the manual as they establish conservation provisions and structures that control soil erosion and sediment movement from construction sites in communities. Updates were sent to more than 300 contacts this summer and during the holidays.

These updates are a service erosion control specialists need and want in Illinois. NRCS is meeting that need.

The Manual contains practices that help control water, reduce flooding, and control soil erosion and sediment movement on construction sites. A recent update on standards and the addition of new practices has been distributed to more than 300 interested parties. Demand for updates on this Manual indicates that erosion control in urban settings is a growing priority in Illinois.

Soil Survey Update News

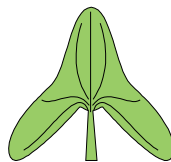
Updated soil survey data and resources are coming to District 17! The final product provides soil data needed for GIS systems and land use planning on CD rom. The CD includes all the data and software needed to select, view, and print out data.

The final products for Rock Island, Mercer, Henry, and Warren Counties is scheduled for delivery in 2001. McDonough, and Knox Counties will be due out in 2001. Henderson County will be completed in 2003. Adams County's CD will be done this year.



For more information on the status of soil surveys in your congressional district, please feel free to email NRCS' State Soil Scientist at BobMcLeese@il.usda.gov

WRP Signup Interest in District 17



Strong interest and success of the Wetland Reserve Program can be found in Congressional District 17. More than 1,400 acres in District 17 have been enrolled into easements that will help protect crops and communities from flooding.

Hancock County	149 acres
McDonough County	218 acres
Whiteside County	275 acres
Rock Island County	84 acres
Fulton County	27.6 acres
Bureau County	547 acres

"What's happening in Congressional District 17 is exactly what WRP is designed to do-- restore large contiguous sections of floodplain areas to wetlands. In the process, we provide protection against flooding and create top quality habitat for wildlife," says Bill Gradle, NRCS State Conservationist.

WRP is a win-win situation as long as federal funding and other state partners are adequate to meet the needs of clients. In many areas of the state, applicants wishing to enroll acreage are waiting to see if NRCS will receive sufficient funds to purchase the easements and begin the restoration work.

"Conservation Day"

Three Counties in Congressional District 17--JoDaviess, Whiteside, and Carroll--joined together to coordinate a "Tri-County Fourth Grade Conservation Day" at Palisades State Park in Savanna, IL.

The goal of the event was to educate youth from all three counties in the importance of natural resource and conservation issues. The program allows the SWCDs a chance to work with and reach out to all students in the area, including under-served students.

More than 700 students from 19 different schools were entertained and instructed by 34 individuals representing 14 partner organizations who joined forces to work with the students. Students attended 7 sessions on various topics including geology, soil conservation, wildlife management, nature walks, for-

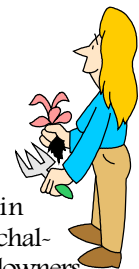


estry, fish management, recycling, water quality, apiary and bats.

Partners involved in the successful event were the U.S. Corps of Engineers, Galena Historical Society, Lake Carroll, IDNR, JoDaviess County Health Department, Natural Area Guardians, NRCS, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, University of Illinois Extension.

"The kids enjoyed the program very much," says Leanne Rahn, University of Illinois Extension Community Worker, Youth, and Family in Carroll County. "The teachers really appreciated the presenters efforts and a good time was had by all."

Lady Landowners Unite!



The summer intern working at the NRCS-SWCD office in McDonough County had the challenge of assisting the Lady Landowners for a "Women in Agriculture" group. Why is such a group needed? The team felt it was the best way to ensure local female landowners were able to get the service and assistance they needed. They felt that an "all women" environment would be more empowering and would facilitate landowner choice and decision-making skill development.

The first task was organizing the first meeting. Speakers presented introductory information from the following agencies--NRCS, RC&D, Rural Development, FSA, and Extension. So far, the group is thriving. Most who attended felt it was a productive gathering and see it as "just the beginning."

Conservation Camp? You Bet!

Fulton County SWCD hosted a "Conservation Camp" for 400 6th Grade students and teachers. Attendees came from nearly every school in Fulton County. The camp experience was designed to provide fun and instruction on

soils, prairie plants, forest habitat, ponds, and fish management, and prairie settlement. Partners from IDNR, NRCS, several local SWCD offices, Farm Bureau, Park Districts, and local historians assisted with the program.

"Educating our state's future leaders and residents on the need for and the value of conservation is an important task for the Illinois Conservation Partnership," says NRCS State Conservationist Bill Gradle.

"Country Living" 101



The Carroll County SWCD and NRCS teams sponsored a watershed tour for the nine members of the Lake Carroll Property Owners Association (POA) Lake Committee. Lake Carroll is a community of 500 with a 640-acre recreational lake. Many of the POA members have retired from eastern urban areas out to the "country" and admit they have little knowledge or familiarity of agriculture. Conservation practices, such as CRP, no-till planting, terraces, contouring, grassed waterways, well-sealing, tillage--all these unknown concepts were briefly explained and reviewed. The tour provided POA members a valuable overview of some of the farming practices and conservation activities that are taking place in their own watershed and made them aware of many conservation measures they themselves can undertake.

Honey Creek Plan is "Sweet"

Both the Planning Committee and the Technical Advisory Committee for the Honey Creek Watershed have been busy researching and developing their watershed plan. The plan is nearly completed, and is under review by top NRCS specialists. This document has been under development for more than a year.

"The Planning Committee has put a great deal of time and effort into this plan," says NRCS District Conservationist Cathy Olson. "They've identified the critical resource concerns for the area, and based on scientific data, they've selected the appropriate actions and solutions needed to address the resource concerns."

Resource concerns identified by the planning committee and a number of stakeholders from within the watershed were 1) Flooding, 2) Wildlife Impacts, 3) Soil Erosion & Water Quality, 4) Economics.

Once implemented, the actions outlined within this watershed plan will address these and many related issues.

The plan is designed to reduce flooding by 50%, stop upland flooding, reduce safety concerns related to flooding--road closings and grave damage in local cemeteries--reduce streambank erosion, increase the amount of conservation practices within the watershed, increase the quality and the amount of woodland wildlife habitat, reduce crop damage and loss, improve recreational access and revenue, and reduce damage to homes and property caused by flooding. For more details on the watershed plan or for a copy of the document, contact the NRCS office in Stronghurst at (309) 924-1167.

Bald Eagle Days

NRCS, Rock Island County SWCD, and Interstate RC&D staff, directors, and council members hosted an exhibit at the Bald Eagle Days Environmental Show in Rock Island January 8 and 9, 2000. Staff interacted with many local residents and children, de-



livering the message that conservation can be a reality even in a backyard. More than 21,000 people attended the show this year. Most visitors are from urban communities and are interested in environmental issues.

Court Creek Plans

The Pilot Watershed Program was developed through the Natural Resources Coordinating Council to coordinate and evaluate watershed management activities in Illinois. This program differs from other watershed treatment efforts in that the technical and financial resources of state and federal agencies will be coordinated under a new approach to enhance natural resource conservation.

Agencies involved --IDNR, IDOA, IEPA, and NRCS--are coordinating efforts to develop watershed plans, to gather baseline data from which to measure watershed treatment successes, and to implement natural resource conservation programs.

Court Creek, located in west-central Illinois, is one of four pilot projects. In selecting the watershed, several factors were considered--interest and support of the local committee and landowners, overlapping resource management concerns by partner agencies, rolling topography and highly erodible soils--were all considered. Land use in the area is mostly agriculture, but includes urban areas, (Galesburg), two county landfills, and livestock production.

IDOA has earmarked \$50,000 of its Conservation Practices Program (CPP) for use in putting conservation on the ground in the Court Creek Watershed. The maximum cost-share rate will be 75%, instead of 60% under regular CPP. Only landowners within the defined boundary area are eligible. IDNR has appropriated \$250,000 annual for a four year period to implement similar practices in the area.

Saving Lake Argyle

Argyle Lake is located seven miles west of Macomb, Illinois and two miles North of the community of Colchester. Its watershed consists of 3,618 acres. The watershed, in the Lamoine River Basin, is about half cropland. According to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's Illinois Water Quality Report, Argyle Lake is impaired by nutrients, siltation, organic matter, and suspended solids.

The McDonough County SWCD and its staff submitted an application to NRCS to make the Argyle Lake Watershed an EQIP Priority Area since problems within the watershed are contributing to declines in recreational opportunities. The primary resource concerns for the Lake are sedimentation and water quality. Secondary concerns are stream bank erosion, recreation, and fish habitat.

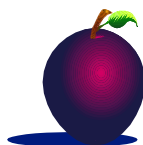
The objective is to reduce the amount of sediment reaching the lake, increase nutrient management, and improve fish and wildlife habitat throughout the watershed. This will be accomplished by implementing a number of conservation practices throughout the watershed -- dry dams, waterways, grade control structures, ponds, terraces, and possibly new wetland development.

This EQIP Priority Area application is only half of the watershed's proposed solution. NRCS is also working with Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) on a PL-566 project, that has had Planning Authorization for some time, that will assist IDNR in implementing the portion of the plan that can not be implemented by private land owners.

It is a well known fact that the majority of the silt in the Lake comes from gully and stream bank erosion. This plan proposes that large water and sediment basins be constructed within the watershed in order to stop the majority of the silt from reaching the lake and to develop some wetland areas which would serve as a mechanism for filtering out nutrients.

The McDonough County EQIP application has been recommended for approval by the EQIP subcommittee to the State Technical Committee, and NRCS and IDNR are getting closer to coming to an agreement on the PL-566 project status. A well planned and orchestrated combination of these two programs will protect Lake Argyle for years to come.

Plum River Problems Addressed With Conservation



The Plum River Watershed is located Carroll, JoDaviess, and Stephenson Counties. The local work group of 18 persons representing seven different organizations began meeting in December of 1997 and has made tremendous progress in addressing problems in the area.

The major resource concerns identified by the group are:

- Soil Erosion
- Streambank Stabilization
- Land Use Conversion
- Water Quality and Animal Waste

EQIP funding of \$275,544 has been requested for the 145,992 acre watershed. In addition, the Blackhawk Hills RC&D is assisting the group with an EPA 319 Grant of \$142,900 to work on critical water quality issues.

When all the planned treatments are installed, the benefits will be tremendous:

- Erosion will be reduced on 25,000 acres of cropland and 1,500 acres of pasture or woods.
- More than 15,000 feet of streambank will be stabilized.
- 200 acres of Filter Strips and Riparian Buffers will be enrolled into CRP.
- Water quality will be enhanced by enrolling 5,000 acres of lands into the CRP including tree planting and wildlife habitat.
- 100 rural abandoned wells will be decommissioned.

NRCS Directory

for Congressional District 17

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Soil Survey Project Leader Steve Elmer
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NRCS District Conservationists by County

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